DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 357 652 FL 021 308

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TITLE Connotations of Surprise in the Conditionals 'To' and 'Tara' in Japanese: A Review and Synthesis.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 14p.; For the serial issue in which this paper appears, see FL 021 304.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Kansas Working Papers in Linguistics; v18 p61-73 1993

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Japanese; Language Research; *Linguistic Theory
IDENTIFIERS *Conditionals; *Connotations

ABSTRACT

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CONNOTATIONS OF SURPRISE IN THE CONDITIONALS *TO* AND *TARA* IN JAPANESE: A Review and Synthesis

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Abstract: The two conditionals *to* and *-tara* in Japanese do not carry neutral connotations. This paper offers evidence to support the claim that *-tara* can carry, among other things, a connotation of surprise in reference to specific past events. However, evidence is also offered to show that the conditional *to*, contrary to what is stated in most reference grammars, carries connotations of inevitability even when the sentence refers to a specific sequence of past events.

Introduction

Many scholars studying the Japanese language assert that the two conditionals *to* and *-tara* can carry a connotation of surprise when referring to specific events in the past.[1] For example the Japanese sentence 'mado-o akeru *to* yuki-ga futte ita' has the literal meaning 'when I opened the window, I discovered it was snowing' (McClain 1981:30). However, some scholars feel that its actual meaning is something closer to 'when I opened the window, I was surprised to see that it was snowing.' A similar observation is made about the *-tara* structure. For example, the Japanese sentence 'gakkoo-ni it-*tara*, mada dare-mo kite inakatta' has a literal meaning 'when I went to school, no one had come yet' (Kuno 1973:180). It is thought by many scholars that this construction too carries connotations of surprise as if to say 'when I went to school, I was surprised to find that no one had come yet.' In this paper, I will examine the nature of the *to* and *-tara* conditionals and I will offer evidence to show that the *-tara* conditional does seem to connote surprise in special cases, but the *to* conditional does not connote surprise--indeed the very nature of the *to* conditional prevents it from having this particular meaning.

The Conditional *to* and Surprise

In a conditional expression, *to* is 'a subordinate conjunction which marks a condition that brings about a

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Kansas Working Papers in Linguistics, Volume 18, 1993, pp. 61-73

noncontrollable event or state' (Makino and Tsutsui 1986:480). In addition, this noncontrollable event or state must be a habitual, natural, inevitable, or immediate consequence of the antecedent sentence which precedes *to* (Buechler 1983:8-9). In terms of grammatical restrictions, the predicate of the consequent clause cannot be a form which expresses a command, a request, a suggestion, an invitation, or a volition (Makino and Tsutsui 1986:481-82). This is due to the fact that the consequent sentence must be objective and non-speaker oriented (Hinds and Tawa 1975-76:9). Finally, S_2 takes place after S_1 is completed (Kuno 1973:193). In use *to* has various meanings such as 'when', 'whenever', 'as soon as', or 'if', and the context usually makes the meaning clear. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the normal use of the *to* conditional.

(1) Fuyu-ni naru *to* Bahama-ni iku.
'Whenever winter comes, I go to the Bahamas.'

(2) Natsu-ni naru *to* totemo mushiatsui.
'Whenever summer comes, it gets hot and humid.'

(3) KabiN-o otosu *to* kowareru.
'If you drop the vase, it will break.'

(4) Ano hito-ni kiku *to* sugu wakaru.
'If you ask that person, you will find out right away.'

In the above sentences, the conditional *to* does not carry any connotation of surprise. However, Kuno (1973) asserts that there is another use of *to* which refers to specific events in the past in a way such that there is no logical antecedent-consequent relationship between the two clauses, and Kuno adds that there is no particular relationship between this second use of *to* and its normal use in examples 1 through 4 (193-94). And even though there is no logical antecedent-consequent relationship involved between the two clauses in the second use, Kuno asserts that the relationship must be close enough to paraphrase as 'upon S_1's happening (or while S_2 was happening), what do you think happened? S_2 did' (189). The following example from Kuno (1973:188) will illustrate this.

(5) Ie-de nete iru *to* Biru-ga tazunete kita.
'While I was in bed at home, Bill came to

visit.'

Kuno claims that there is a quality of surprise (or at least suspense) in S_1 *to* S_2 in example 5, and this results from the fact that S_2 is told objectively from the speaker's point of view, as if to say 'after S_1 happened, I (the speaker) observed/saw/found S_2.' (190-91). This corresponds with what Martin (1975) has termed an 'observation condition' where S_1 *to* S_2 is in the perfect tense and refers to specific events, and thus takes on the meaning 'upon ...ing, I notice(d) that...' or 'when ..., what was noticed was...' (557). The previous example and the following example from Martin (1975:557) illustrates this meaning.

(6) Ushiro-o miru *to* Nakamura-kuN-ga nikoniko waratte ita.
'When I looked back, I saw Mr. Nakamura smiling.'

Note, however, that S_2 is told objectively in examples 1 through 4 as well, and there is no connotation of surprise whatsoever in those examples--whether or not S_2 is told from the speaker's point of view is irrelevant. Thus Kuno's paraphrase of S_1 *to* S_2 given above to explain surprise fails. It fails because there is no connotation of surprise with the *to* conditional. The very fact that the sentence is told objectively denies any connotation of surprise. In example 5 the speaker is not stating surprise at the visitor by the use of *to*, but rather stating that there was an expectation that a visitor would arrive, which was confirmed by the visit. Similarly, Example 6 is also a confirmation of something which was suspected by the speaker. Thus, the conditional *to* forces a connotation of inevitability even when the relationship between the clauses is not an obvious cause-effect relationship as it is in examples 1 through 4.

Consider an example like the following.

(7) Nichiyoobi-ni naru *to* itsumo ame-ga futta.
'Whenever Sunday came, it always rained.'

There is no known phenomenon which brings rain every week, so the listener may indeed be taken aback by such a statement. Yet this example is perfectly grammatical. It is undoubtedly the acceptability of sentences like this which leave the issue of surprise in the *to* conditional open to debate, but I will show that even a sentence such as example 7 does not connote

surprise.

In referring to Kuno's interpretation of *to*, Hinds and Tawa (1975-76:10) assert that the connotation of surprise or suspense is an unnecessary statement, but they do not explain this comment nor do they explore the issue of surprise. Buechler (1983), in his thesis, comes close to denying outright any connotation of surprise inherent in *to* itself, and it is useful to outline Buechler's thoughts concerning *to*. First of all, Buechler correctly states that in using S_1 *to* S_2, the 'speaker suggests that it is possible to predict that on the occurrence of S_1, S_2 will occur' (14). Examples 1 through 4 above are illustrations of this view of *to*. In addition, Buechler tries to simplify the syntactic considerations of the *to* conditional by stating that *to* merely connects factual or objectively observed events, and thus both the statements and their relationship are factual and logical (14). And so

> when S_1 *to* S_2 refers to a specific sequence of events . . . the relationship between S_1 and S_2 can be stated as fact, since the occurrence of the events in sequence has been observed. The speaker is simply recounting events which he has experienced (15).

He also asserts that

> the connotation of surprise or discovery, if there is such a connotation, derives, not from the use of the pattern S_1 *to* S_2, but from the fact that the relationship between the events referred to in S_1 and S_2 is unexpected [by the listener] (11).

While these observations are generally correct, Buechler does not take them far enough. Regardless of whether or not the listener is aware of the relationship, the speaker is still expressing a logical relationship by choosing the *to* conditional, and so no connotation of surprise is intended; and in fact, if the listener understands the proper use of the *to* conditional, then no connotation of surprise should be detectable. Therefore, while the listener may pause for a moment when hearing a sentence such as example 7 above, the sentence will be taken by a native speaker as an expression of cumulative factual experience which seems to be more or less true, albeit not necessarily the result of natural phenomenon.

Thus, when asked, native speakers of Japanese can detect no connotation of surprise in a *to* conditional sentence. Indeed, when given an 'observation condition' sentence relating a sequence of past events, native speakers generally detected the connotation of inevitability about the events described in the sentence.[1] Two native speakers gave an example of the inevitability of the opening lines of Yasunari Kawabata's novel Yukiguni, which is in the form of S_1 *to* S_2 and refers to a specific sequence of past events.

(8) Kokkyoo-no nagai toNneru-o nukeru *to* yukiguni de atta (Kawabata 1968:5).
'The train emerged from the long tunnel at the frontier and was in the snow country.'

This is entirely consistent with the function of *to*. McGloin (1976-77:182) has pointed out that *to* has a tendency to be used in 'generic cases' (rather than in specific instances) because of its air of inevitability. Thus, it normally means 'whenever'. McGloin also points out that *to* can be used in reference to specific events in the future, and when used in this way it has connotations of objective fact (182). Example 4 and the following example illustrate this.

(9) Raishuu iku *to* motto yasuku kaeru.
'If you go next week, you can buy it for less.'

McGloin's discussion of the conditionals is restricted to non-past events, but it would be surprising indeed if in reference to specific past events the *to* conditional was to carry the special meaning of surprise since this meaning is the complete antipode of its regular meaning. In fact the conditional *to* connects an inevitable clause with its antecedent, regardless of the tense of the sentence. The example below further illustrates this point.

(10) SeNsoo-ga sumu *to* doNdoN shiNpo shita.
'When the war ended there was rapid progress.'

Example 9 does not express any degree of surprise. Rather, it expresses two factual events in the past and describes an inevitable relationship between these events. The speaker wishes to express a particular relationship of inevitability between two clauses and

so selects the *to* conditional, and the listener understands this inevitability even if the relationship was not known previously. This is due to the nature of the *to* conditional.

The Conditional *tara* and Surprise

If it is the case that the speaker wishes to suggest surprise at specific past events, then the speaker can use the conditional *-tara* to accomplish this, for *-tara* does not necessarily express an inevitable or obvious relationship between two clauses, although it can often do this. The conditional *-tara* 'indicates an antecedent-subsequent relationship. It is concerned with temporal sequence' (Murayama 1985:119). The following is a typical use of the *-tara* construction, which does not connote surprise.

(11) Juuniji-ni nat-*tara* basu-ga nakunaru.
'The buses stop coming after 12 o'clock.'

There are several syntactic features of the *-tara* conditional which could possibly contribute to a connotation of surprise. The conditional *-tara* is 'a subordinate conjunction which indicates that the action/state expressed by the main clause in a sentence takes place after the action/state expressed by the subordinate clause' (Makino and Tsutsui 1986:452). Note that this is a very different conditional than *to*. 'Unlike *to*, *-tara* implies individual instances and does not imply an inevitable or habitual connection between S_1 and S_2: S_1 occurs and accidentally S_2 follows' (Murayama 1985:119). In addition *-tara* is often used to express a subjective feeling in S_2: either invitation, request, determination, permission, and the like (Murayama 1985:120). This also explains the preference for *-tara* when S_2 is an imperative or an interrogative (McClain 1981:31). Thus, the following is a common way of using the *-tara* conditional.

(12) Tookyoo-ni tsui-*tara* deNwa shite kudasai.
'When you get to Tokyo, please call me.'

Moreover, when using the *-tara* conditional, the speaker is making an original contribution to the discourse in S_2 and thus when the action of S_1 is complete, S_2 is 'speaker-oriented' and generally indicates new information (Hinds and Tawa 1975-76:8). The following example illustrates this.

(13) A: Sotsugyoo shi-*tara* nani-o suru tsumori

desu ka?
'After graduation, what are your plans?'
B: Sotsugyoo shi-*tara* Amerika-de hataraki-tai-to omoimasu.
'After graduation, I want to work in America.'

In addition, *-tara* tends to be used in specific instances rather than in generic cases (McGloin 1976-77:182). These features of the *-tara* conditional could all contribute to a connotation of surprise in S_2.

In addition, one grammar reference states that '[w]hen S_2 in "S_1 *tara* S_2" represents a past action, the action cannot be one intentionally taken by the agent after the action or event represented by S_1' (Makino and Tsutsui 1986:455). Kuno (1973) asserts the same proposition stating that when the action of S_2 *tara* S_1 is in the past, then there can be no 'self-controllable timing' between S_1 and S_2 (181). Buechler (1983) defines this as follows: 'A "self-controllable timing" between two events exists when a single agent controls both events and, therefore, the time lapse between the events' (24). However, Buechler does not agree with Kuno that self-controllable timing is a factor when using *-tara*, but instead explains that the important feature is that S_2 be an original contribution to the discourse by the speaker (24-26).[3] Kuno (1973) states that 'the requirement S_1 and S_2 in S_2 *tara* S_1 have no self-controllable time sequence is responsible for the peculiar overtone attached to the pattern: namely, S_1 normally represents an unexpected or surprising event' (181-82).

Nonetheless, Kuno's explanation of surprise is seriously undermined by Buechler's persuasive evidence indicating that self-controllable timing is not a factor, and in fact Buechler's argument, while undermining one explanation for surprise, lends support for another, more persuasive element which contributes to a connotation of surprise in the *-tara* conditional. It is one of three elements on which I will focus as being the primary contributors to the air of surprise in the *-tara* conditional, but it is best discussed after giving the first element (The features of this conditional given at the beginning of this section above could all possibly contribute to the connotation of surprise, but they are not major factors). The third element involves the actual *-tara* conditional itself and will be discussed along with the noun *toki* in the section which follows this one.

First, it seems that a major cause of surprise in the *-tara* construction is the fact that this conditional is concerned only with temporal sequence, and so one can connect almost any two events with it. Although the relationship may in actuality be cause and effect, inevitability, conditional, and the like, the speaker uses the *-tara* construction to comment on the events in terms of their temporal sequence. The following examples are illustrations of the use of *-tara* to connote surprise.

(14) Uchi-ni kaet-*tara* deNpoo-ga kite ita.
'When I returned home, a telegram had arrived.'

(15) Hikooki-ni not-*tara* Tanaka-saN-ni atta.
'When I boarded the plane, I met Mr. Tanaka.'

(16) Meari-no apaato-ni it-*tara* chuushoku-o gochisoo shite kureta.
'When I went to Mary's apartment, she treated me to lunch.'

In addition, native speakers of Japanese can sense a connotation of surprise occasionally when S_1 *tara* S_2 refers to events in the past.[3] Native speakers could detect surprise in the following example from Buechler (1983:47).

(17) Mado-kara kubi-o dashi-*tara* ame-ga futte ita.
'When I stuck my head out the window, it was raining.'

In Examples 14 through 17, the two events have no particular relationship apart from the fact that one occurred after the other, or the second event was noticed after the completion of the first event, and so the conditional sentence carries an air of surprise about it. Thus, it seems that part of the connotation of surprise is due to the accidental temporal relationship placed between the two events.

But the connotation of surprise cannot exist if the speaker does not intend it, and this is where the insistence by Hinds and Tawa (1975-76), as well as Buechler (1983), that S_2 must be an original contribution to the discourse enters. It is interesting to note that the *-tara* conditional is sometimes interchangeable with the other conditionals. For instance, in example 11 above, *-tara* could be exchanged for *to* without a change in the meaning of the

sentence. And so while it can express the same inevitable or logical relationship as that of the *to* conditional, it can also express surprise when it refers to a sequence of past events. This is explained by the fact that the speaker is choosing information to contribute to the discourse in S_2. The speaker can choose information which proceeds logically from the first clause, or the speaker can present the second clause as something which was surprising, or the speaker can present the relationship in some other light. This concept helps explain part of the connotation of surprise in the following example.

(18) Kuji-kara chuugokugo-no koogi-ni kyoo-wa amari dete konai daroo-to omotte i-*tara*, hotoNdo miNna dete kite ita (Hibbitt and Itasaka 1967:70-71).
'I was thinking that most people would not attend the nine o'clock Chinese class today, but nearly everyone showed up.'

Notice that in this sentence the *-tara* construction is a reversal of reasoning indicating surprise. The use of *-tara* in the above example is meant to convey to the listener the feeling of surprise felt by the speaker on encountering the event which was not expected to occur.

The Use of *toki* in Japanese

Some may still wonder whether it is the case that the conditionals *to* and *-tara* themselves carry their peculiar meanings--inevitability in the case of *to* and surprise in the case of *-tara*--or whether they take on their meanings because of the nature of the entire sentence. I will offer support for the former and will use the noun *toki* as evidence. Both the conditional *to* and the conditional *-tara* necessarily take the meaning of 'when' in cases where they are used to refer to specific past events which actually occurred (in contrast, a counterfactual statement can refer to specific past events that did not occur and thus take the meaning 'if'). However, if the speaker wishes to make a 'when' statement in Japanese in reference to past events and make certain that the sentence is completely neutral in connotation, then the speaker has the option of using S_1 *toki* S_2. Some examples will suffice to illustrate this.

(19) Baa-ni hait-*tara* Taroo-ga sake-o noNde ita.
'On entering the bar, I discovered that Taroo was drinking sake.'

(20) Baa-ni haitta *toki* Taroo-ga sake-o noNde ita.
'When I entered the bar, Taroo was drinking sake.'

Although the two examples above based on sentences from Kuno (1973:190) can be translated identically, doing so would not capture the true flavor of the utterances. The first indicates surprise, while the second is neutral. The following contrasts *toki* and *to*.

(21) Soto-ni deru *to* ame-ga futte ita.
'As expected, when I went outside, it was raining.'

(22) Soto-ni deta *toki* ame-ga futte ita.
'When I went outside, it was raining.'

These two examples from Kuno (1973:190) could also be translated identically, but the real meaning would be lost by doing so. When the speaker's intention is merely to recount two events which happened to co-occur, then *toki* can be chosen. If the speaker desires to inject personal feelings on the events into the utterance, then a conditional can be chosen.

In the discussion of the *-tara* conditional above, I pointed out two major elements which seem to contribute to the connotation of surprise in the *-tara* construction. The evidence offered with the use of *toki* supports the argument that at least part of the connotation of surprise is carried by the conditional itself as an expression of the speaker's feelings regarding the events of S_1 and S_2.

Summary and Conclusion

The point about *to* and *-tara* can be shown clearly in the following examples.

(23) Meari-ga kuru *to* Jon-ga kaetta.
'Naturally, when Mary came, John left.'

(24) Meari-ga ki-*tara* Jon-ga kaetta.
'Surprisingly, when Mary came, John left.'

When these two Japanese sentences from Kuno (1973:192) were given to native Japanese speakers, the first was thought to be inevitable, whereas the second was generally thought to convey surprise. I have changed Kuno's translations of these sentences to reflect this point. However, Example 24 could also convey

inevitability given a context which would support that connotation, thus showing that *-tara*, unlike *to* is not restricted to a single connotation, but rather depends on the context and the speaker's intent, as well as the perception of the listener.

In conclusion, the conditional *to* is used to connect a logical, non-controllable, objective consequent with its antecedent. The evidence offered in this paper supports the assertion that the *to* construction still carries this same connotation of inevitability when referring to a specific sequence of past events. On the other hand, the *-tara* conditional can often be used to connote surprise, and it can be used in this way because there are few restrictions upon its use. It connects two clauses, but they need have no particular relationship apart from the fact that the second clause happened to occur after the first clause. Thus, if the relationship between the events of the two clauses is an unexpected one, then the construction can express surprise, although the *-tara* conditional can only carry this connotation in describing past events. In addition, since the speaker is making an original contribution, then the speaker can choose to express surprise with the *-tara* conditional. Finally, *toki* was used to offer evidence showing that the peculiar overtones of the two types of conditional sentences are carried at least in part by the conditional conjunctions themselves, and the speaker purposely chooses one if a particular connotation is intended for the utterance.

NOTES

[1] This is a slightly revised paper presented in Dr. Akira Yamamoto's course, The Structure of Japanese (University of Kansas, Fall 1992). The suggestions and comments from Dr. Yamamoto and the other members of the course were extremely valuable, and I would like to thank all of them. I would also like to thank the native Japanese speakers who answered my questions on the conditionals--Professors Akira and Fumiko Yamamoto, Kiyoko Metoki, Risa Ueda, and Hiromi Nakamura. Thanks are also due to Norma Sakamoto-Larzalere for reading the paper and offering valuable comments. The idea for this paper arose in Dr. Maggie Childs' reading course

in Japanese, and I would like to thank her for the initial explanation of surprise in the *tara* conditional. Any errors, however, are my own responsibility. The Hepburn system for romanized Japanese is used throughout with a few exceptions. Syllabic *n* is always written *N* (i.e. shiNbuN). Long vowels are doubled (i.e. oneesaN, sotsugyoo). I have often used the abbreviations 'S_1' and 'S_2' to refer to the first and second clauses respectively in a conditional expression.

[3] There are four conditionals in Japanese--*to*, -*tara*, -*ba*, and *nara*. This paper deals only with the first two. However, there does not appear to be any connotations of surprise or inevitability in the other two conditionals.

[4] I am indebted to the several native Japanese speakers who kindly answered my questions about the conditionals.

[5] See Buechler (1983), especially pages 24-26, for more on this.

[6] Again, thanks are due to the native Japanese speakers who kindly answered my questions and gave their views on the conditionals.

[7] *Toki* is a Japanese noun which literally means 'time'. Thus, when it is modified by an expression, the entire clause has the meaning '(at) the time of ...' or 'when ...'.

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